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War Poems

By "X"

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1917

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TO
THE ARTISTS' RIFLES
(BELOVED OF MARS AND MINERVA)
IN THE
FIRST BATTALION
OF WHICH
REGIMENT
I HAVE MANY FRIENDS
NAM UT OMITTAM
PHILIPPUM
THIS BOOK IS
RESPECTFULLY
DEDICATED

Contents

	PAGE
A Song of Pride for England	3
Sons	7
Unto the End	10
Valour	12
Post Prælium	13
Marching On	16
Sergeant Death	19
Dawn	22
Kitchener	23
For Righteousness' Sake	24
Lovers	26
John Travers Cornwell	27
In the Train	29
Steel-True and Blade-Straight	32
Sursum	34
The Full Share	36
Killed	40
Dying for your Country	42
A Chant of Affection	44
The Riddle	49
Ubi Bene	51
Cor Cordium	52

Contents

	PAGE
A Rhyme of Gaffer D—	53
• The Ass	57
The Diners	58
A Rhyme of Right or Wrong	61
July 1, 1916	64
To the Kaiser	66
Joffre	67
Excuses	71
It	74
1912	76
Towards the Reckoning	80
Verdun	81
Ireland	82
If	84
Wounded	86
• Come Young Lads First	88
The Rhyme of the Beast	91
Gaudeamus	93
For Whom it may Concern	95
Slain	97

War Poems
By “X”

I

II

3

III

Shrewd, on our world of seas,
Waketh at dawn a breeze
Singing bold melodies,

England!

Rose-red the long day falls,
And the frore night wind calls
To our proud Admirals,

“England again!”

IV

Our Ensign flutters still
On the unshaken hill;
Our Bugle vaunteth shrill,
England!

What of the heathen draff?
They are as burning chaff,
Into their eyes we laugh,

England again!

V

Death in his charnel-house,
Rage and the Devil's spouse
Hate—ruffle not your brows,
England!

Blood of your fathers' blood,
Bred of great motherhood,
Suckled on ancient good—
“England again!”

VI

You shall be steel and ice,
Stronger than love, and thrice
Stricken for sacrifice,
England!
You shall bow to the flail,
The hammer and the nail,
And perish—and prevail,
England again!

VII

While this our little land
Hath a man-child to stand,
He shall lift up his hand,
England,
To smite the accursèd bars:
Out of the din of wars
He shall shout to the stars,
“England again!”

VIII

Troop you from field and fold,
Market and shop of gold;
Let the full tale be told,

England!

Time beats his pitiless drum,
Fate's at her iron loom,
For the New Earth, or Doom—

England again!

Sons

I

We have sent them forth
To Christ's own rood;
Their feet are white
On the fields of blood,
And they must slake
Their young desire
In wells of death
And pits of fire.

The red cock crows
And the grey cock crows
And there is red
On Flanders' snows;
And sun-scorched sand
And thirsty clay
Drink a red spilth
By Suvla Bay.

And where Azizeah's
Turrets gleam,
And Tigris glitters,
Like a dream,
Through nights of scent
And tinkling sounds,
Sleep rose-white dead
With rose-red wounds.

II

I saw the Shadow
Count the fair
Sum of his takings;
Them that were
Children in years
When they were sped,
And now are mighty
Being dead.

Like galaxies
Of stars, they shone
In the great places
They have won;
He sets them there,
No sting hath he,
And his is not
The Victory.

And whom he spared
I saw return,
Ambassadors
From his brave bourne—
Strong with the wisdom
Of the Wars,
Bright from the camps
Of Conquerors.

Unto the End

Though the rivers of crystal run blood till the seas are
blood,
And the lands which were for proud harvests gape livid
with death;
And the goodness we had of the days is emptied for ever
of good,
And for ever the balm of the silver night faileth and
perisheth;
And though from the womb our sons know only to rage
and kill,
And our daughters forget that a bride is wed not for
widow but wife;
And War, which the wise of their wisdom accounted the
chiefest ill,
Boasteth itself for the glory and blessing and purport of
life;
Yea, though these things were established for ever—how
should we quail,
Or falter, or doubt that the sheer, stark soul of us shall
prevail?

We are done with the laughter and solace, the softness, the
bloom,
The clusters and sheaves of content, the honey and milk;
We are gone from the beautiful places unto the brinks of
doom,
Where that is sharp which was sweet and that is steel
which was silk,
And that is woe which was flesh, and hurt which was
delight,
And the fairest and kindest love must sort with a lurking
hate,
And the heart of pity be stone within her, and wrong be
but right,
And our very prayers are for power to punish and desolate;
Yea, stript to the spirit we stand, naked and very sure
Of naught but the spirit, which, if it triumph not, yet shall
endure.

Valour

Mounting his stairs of azure and of gold,
The English lark sings in the August weather
For joy which knoweth neither tie nor tether
And is not troubled if the world grows old;
While you, who were as blithesome and as bold,
And held your life lightly as any feather,
Sleep the high sleep that dead men sleep together,
Careless of what is done and what is told.

I know that all our England shone before you
When you went down. It made a radiance
Even of the front of Death. Oh, woman's son,
You died for England . . . valiant as she that bore you,
And sent you forth with a still countenance,
And broke her heart for England and lives on!

Post Prælium

[*Jutland*]

I

Lovely, and mightily-thewed
Mother of this great brood,
Lo, the beatitude
Falls on thee like a flood,
And folds thee where thou'rt stood
Fronting the destinies
With comfortable eyes.

II

Now knowest thou the rose
Which to the sweet air blows
In thy fair garden-close,
And thine own lark that throws
Down music as he goes
Vaunting to heaven of thee,
Are not for the enemy.

III

Now knowest thou the maid
Of her young joy unstayed,
And matrons who have said
Most secret prayers, afraid
To tell themselves they prayed—
In thy green land shall dwell
Safe and inviolable.

IV

Woodland and russet farm,
And hamlet, and the warm
And goodly towns where swarm
Thy populations, Harm
Taketh not in her palm;
And never will they know
The tread of any foe.

V

For round thee is the sheer
Might of the mariner
Whom thou didst suckle and rear
And give for the ships. No peer
Hath he to drive and steer
And fight till the last bells
The steely citadels.

VI

Now knowest thou the deeps
Of a verity thine; nor sleeps
Nor fails the ward. Who leaps
For what thy Amireld keeps,
Soweth a wind, and reaps
 The whirlwind from thy guns,
 The lightning from thy sons.

VII

Blessèd art thou that sent
These to be strawne and spent;
And blessèd they that went,
Singing with heart's content,
Unto the sacrament;
 And blessèd they that mourn
 Whoso shall not return.

Marching On

I

I heard the young lads singing
In the still morning air,
Gaily the notes came ringing
Across the lilac'd square;
They sang like happy children
Who know not doubt or care,
"AS WE GO MARCHING ON."

And each one sloped a rifle
And each one bore a pack;
They had no grief to stifle,
No tears to weep, alack;
They were too blithe to question
Which of them should come back,
As they went marching on.

II

Oh, thou whose eyes are sorrow,
And whose soul is sorrowing,
Who knowest that each to-morrow
A deeper woe may bring,
And knowest that all the comfort
Is the very littlest thing
While they go marching on!

These sons of thine seek glory,
As the bridegroom seeks the bride,
And who shall tell the story
Of their triumph and their pride?
Like lovers, for the love of thee
They have lain them down and died;
And they go marching on.

III

They march by field and city,
By every road and way,
A march which angels pity
And none may stop or stay
Till the last head is rested
On the last crimson clay;
So they go marching on!

They march in the broad sunlight
And by the lovers' moon;
Into the flame and gun-light
From morns and eves of June,
And Death for their entrancèd feet
Pipes an obsequious tune,
And keeps them marching on.

IV

And mid the battle thunder,
And in the fields of blood,
They see the untarnished wonder,
The healing, and the good
Which passeth understanding
And can not be understood;
And they go marching on.

They see the rose's brightness
Made perfect and complete,
Lilies and snows of whiteness,
And wings of gold that beat
For ever and for ever
Before the Paraclete;
And they go marching on.

Sergeant Death

Oh, Sergeant Death,
I've served with you,
And chanced my breath
A time or two!

I've seen brave men
Turn green as sin,
When you have coughed,
"Fall in, fall in!"

I've heard brave men
With cold fear shout,
When you have piped,
"Fall out, fall out!"

Where'er a lad
Would do his part,
'Tis you that probes
His inmost heart.

Though all be stirred
By drums a-roll,
'Tis you that finds
The soldier soul,

And takes him through
The conqueror's drill,
And helps him home,
Or leaves him still.

'Tis you that puts
In one parade
Them that were anxious
And afraid,

And them that were
Fed-up and sick,
And them that begged
You to be quick,

And them that gave
You laugh for laugh,
And bitterer chaff
For bitter chaff. . . .

Oh, you are old,
And fierce and wise,
But there is goodness
In your eyes.

And still your health
Goes round the tents—
“The Father of
The Regiments!”

Dawn

"This morning at dawn I attacked the enemy's second system of defence."—SIR DOUGLAS HAIG

These are the fights of Love and Joy and Men
With Fate and Death and the illicit Beast,
For guerdons, of which Glory is the least
And Honour not the highest. The old reign
Of Night shall topple, the old Wrongs be slain:
Fitting it is that you go to the Feast
While ange suns kindle the young-eyed east
And bring the breath of Eden back again.

Oh soldiers' hour! . . . For now the English rose
Flames and is washed with the authentic dew
And through the mist her ancient crimson shows:
I see your shadows on the waking lawn
Like shadows of kings, and all the souls of you
Blazoned and bright and panoplied in the dawn.

Kitchener

If Death had questioned thee,
"Soldier, where wouldst thou take
The immitigable blow?"
Thou hadst answered, "Let it be
Where the battalions shake
And break the entrenched foe."

Yet wert thou nobly starred
And destined. Thou dost die
On the grim English sea;
Thou goest to the old tarred
Great Captains, and shalt lie
Pillowed with them eternally.

And they shall stir from their rest
Each in his lordly shroud,
And say, "'Fore God, we have room,
So are the deeps made proud,
Behold the glory on his breast,
Kitchener of Khartoum!"

For Righteousness' Sake

Man that is born of a woman—
The creature of doom,
Who lives that the Shadow may summon
Men forth to the tomb;

Who knoweth not wages or earning,
Who sows not to reap,
Whose labour and passion and yearning
Must finish with sleep;

Who catches in vain at the glory;
Whose brightness is rust;
Whose days are a breath and a story;
Whose house is the dust;

Who lies, if he vaunt him of merit,
Whose tree bears no fruit,
Who quenches the spark of the spirit
With lusts of the brute;

Yet—standeth erect to the fighting
And whirlwind and flame,
And squanders himself for the smiting
Of Terror and Shame;

Who gathereth his weakness and brings it
Where furies move;
And loves the world so that he flings it
Away out of love;

Even though he were fashioned to perish
By ordinance grim,
The Sons of the Morning would cherish
Memories of him:

Who owing a debt went and paid it,
And kept with his blood
The Earth for the Wisdom who made it
And saw it was good.

Lovers

He goeth and he returns not. He is dead
Their house of joy no further brightness shows,
Their loveliness is come unto its close,
Their last touch given, and their last kindness said;
For him no more the vision of her bent head,
For her no more the lily or the rose,
Nor any gladness in this place of woes;
The book is shut, the bitter lesson read.

Yet who shall beat them down? Though the Abhorred
Taketh the groom, and to the bride hath sent
The dagger of anguish with the ice-cold hilt,
Both of them triumph in a strange content—
And out of souls like these will heavens be built
And holy cities peopled for the Lord.

John Travers Cornwell

"Boy (first class) John Travers Cornwell, of Chester, was mortally wounded early in the action. He nevertheless remained standing alone at a most exposed post quietly awaiting orders till the end of the action, with the gun's crew dead and wounded all round him."—ADMIRAL BEATTY

Mortally hurt, alone he stood,
England, in thy great fortitude.

While his spent shipmates round him lay
He held on in thine ancient way—

A stripling with the veteran eye
For the hard front of destiny.

Effacing Time shall not destroy
The memory of this, thy boy.

On his young head the glory falls,
As on the lordliest admirals;

Fate sets his name in honour grim
And even Death is proud of him.

In the Train

There's a soldier
By gad! Yes!—
See her gi' me
That there kiss?—

All the people
Crowdin' by:
An' her a maid
As shy as shy!—

Kiss'd me fair
An' plain an' free
Before the blessed
Company—

Whisper'd when
I bent my head—
Mustn't tell you
What she said!

Little 'un,
But very smart,
Stands no higher
Than my heart!

An' *that* straight
An' unafraid,—
Like a corporal
On parade!

Smiles, an' loves you
With her eyes:
Steadies you,
And keeps you wise:

Learns you all
There is to know:
Makes you feel
It's good to go!

.

Women's funny—
So they are!
But who taught 'em
About war?

Where'd they learn
Their bit of drill?
Who is it took 'em
Through the mill?

And gave 'em grit
Enough for ten,
An' sense to share it
With the men?

An' made 'em so
They'd rather die
Than let a soldier
See 'em cry?

An' gives 'em strength
And nerve and grace
To look the postman
In the face?

.

Oh, don't forget it,
Mother's son—
They're soldiers, soldiers
Every one!

Soldiers loving
Them that's gone,
Soldiers, soldiers
"Holding on"—

Proudest Regiment
Ever known,—
Let us call 'em
"The Lord's Own."

Steel-True and Blade-Straight

I

Steel-true and blade-straight—
There's your man! And soon or late
He is England—all of her;
All the Blood that makes her fair,
All the Soul that makes her great,
Steel-true and blade-straight.

II

Steel-true and blade-straight—
Neither puffed out, nor elate,
Neither glad, nor sad, nor sorry,
Seeking neither grace nor glory,
Steadfast at the battered gate—
Steel-true and blade-straight.

III

Steel-true and blade-straight—
Let the pillars of the State
 Wrangle to their hearts' content—
 His to fend and thrust and feint,
His to watch and ward and wait,
Steel-true and blade-straight.

IV

Steel-true and blade-straight—
While we bawl and perorate,
 Big with "ifs" about our war—
 He, the undoubting conqueror,
Knocks the nonsense out of Fate—
Steel-true and blade-straight.

Sursum

I saw his dread plume gleaming,
As he rode down the line,
And cried like one a-dreaming
“That man, and that, is mine!”

They did not fail or falter
Because his front so shone;
His horse's golden halter
With star-dust thick was sown.

They followed him like seigneurs,
Proud both of mien and mind—
Colonels and old campaigners
And bits of lads new-joined.

A glittering way he showed them
Beyond the dim outpost,
And in his tents bestowed them—
White as the Holy Ghost.

And, by the clear watch-fires,
They talk with conquerors,
And have their hearts' desires,
And praise the honest wars.

And each of them in raiment
Of honour goeth drest,
And hath his fee and payment,
And glory on his breast.

O woman, that sit'st weeping—
Close, like the stricken dove,—
He is in goodly keeping,
The soldier thou didst love!

The Full Share

“I take my full share of responsibility for the initiation that operation—my full share. . . . I do not propose adopt the attitude of a white-sheeted penitent, with a couple of candles, one in each hand, doing penance and asking for absolution.”—CABINET MINISTER

I

Do not expect from me
(Whom you have set
In this authority)
Defence, apology,
Excuse or plea,
Or even a regret:
No sheeted penitent
Am I,
To stand
Candle in hand
And cry
That I may be forgiven,
Absolved or shriven,
For what is spilt and spent.

All that has happened so
Is so.
I lay it bare;
Admission I make:
The wisest of us err,
The best plans go awry;
Perhaps we blundered sore;
But I would have you know
No one is more
Responsible than I,
And of the accountability I take
My share—and my full share!

II

In far Gallipoli
Where Achi frowns to the sea,
And wild war-fires are set;
Stark to the Eastern moon,
There lies,
Huddled in the last agonies,
Beside his shattered gun,
A new-slain English boy:
And his dead eyes
Hint not apologies,
Excuses or regret,
Neither dismay nor joy;
No candles at his head
Nor sheet nor shroud has he,

And by his blood-soaked bed
No shriving words are said.

It is a woman's son—
The child she bare
In England free and fair:
Following the English drum
Hitherward is he come,
So to annul
And break
Himself for England's sake—
He, too, hath taken his share,
And taken it in full.

III

Lord of the Mysteries,
Who on the shining air
Launchest despair,
And black, by rose and vine,
Spillest the battle-line;
This is the Bread, and this
The perfumed Wine:
No period dost Thou set
Unto our dole and fret,
Which, being of Thee, are Thine;
Yet, if we yield our breath
To death,

Or keep in strife
This fripperied, fardel life,
Help each of us to bear
His share—and his full share!

Killed

Lieutenant Keen was "great," and yet
He would look over the parapet;
And something smacked him in the head,
And he lay down as dead as dead.

He sluttered down, all proud and grim,
And we set to and buried him;
All night he lay and took his rest
With lumps of Flanders on his breast.

All day he lay in Flanders ground
And rested, rested, good and sound;
But when the dog-star glittered clear
He calls, "By Jove, it's dark down here!"

"Sergeant, ain't I for rounds?" sings he,
"And where's the bally Company?"
And he was answered, with respect,
"Here, sir—all present and correct!"

And—sure as I'm a man—at night
He comes along the trench, as white

And cheerful as the blessèd saints,
To see if there was "no complaints."

They cannot quieten that boy's ghost,
He'll have no truck with no "Last Post,"
They mark him "Killed," but you may swear
He's with us, be it foul or fair.

He goes before us like young fire,
A soldier of his soul's desire;
Through the hell-reek that smothers us,
He fathers us and mothers us.

When we have pushed the German swine
Across the pretty river Rhine,
Maybe he'll bide where he was spent
And lie down happy and content.

Dying for Your Country

I

When Britain first, at Heaven's command,
Arose from out the azure main,
We had no buttons and no band—
We did our murder very plain;
There were no heroes, no V.C.'s,
No glory for the honoured dead—
We went and slew our enemies,
Or they slew us, and nothing said.

II

Slaughter was slaughter, gore was gore,
And kicks were kicks the same as now,
And death was just as sharp and sure,
And just as cooling to the brow.
We did not fight for pelf or fame,
Neither for honour did we strive,
Nor for to make Old England's name,
But just to keep ourselves alive.

III

It's him or you, ourselves or *them*—

An ugly wild-beast law—and yet
It hits us with a gust like flame

When we are minded to forget;
For all our sweet tarantara,

Our “love of right” and “hate of ill,”
Boil down to the old formula—

We must be killed unless we kill.

IV

So, Johnny, keep your barrel bright,

And go where you are told to go,
And when you meet, by day or night,

Our friend the enemy, lay him low;
And you must neither boast nor quake,

Though big guns roar and whizz-bangs whizz—
Don't die for your dear country's sake,

But let the other chap die for his.

A Chant of Affection

And so you hate us! You
Hate England—hate, hate, hate!
A bestial brewage, racked
Out of the pits and holes
Of foulness and deceit,
Riots in your unclean veins;
You burn, you rage, you choke.
You spit and splutter hate
For England! . . . To the Russ,
Battering your Eastern doors,
You have a mind to turn
The blubbered other cheek;
The Gaul—your sweet old friend
And crony of your love—
For him, dear soul, white flags,
Garlands and pretty lures,
Doves, promises, desire
To load him with the half
Of that you filched away:
For Belgia, “bleeding hearts,”
Laments, regrets, “mild rule,”
Cheap headstones for her sons,

And for her daughters *You*—
That they may suage your lusts
And, by the fireless hearths
You have made desolate,
Be snugly brought to bed
Of further Attilas
And blonde Barabbases—
Liegés and “gun fodder”
For the top-heavy Dolt
Whom ye call Kaiser and Lord. . . .
Yea, holy are your eyes
And filled with kindly beams
For these and all the world:
On Turk and Pole and Boer,
Bulgar, American,
You smile your panderous smile—
But for the English—Hate!

And you will rend our Throat,
And you will bite our Heel,
And you will stamp us down:
You put an oath on bronze
(No paper this time—bronze!
Which is not easily blown
On winds of treachery!)
You have made an oath of bronze,
An oath no wind may shake,
An oath for your sons and their sons
One foe and one alone—

ENGLAND ! For England hate!
And hate and hate and hate!

How shall we hate you back
We who are England; we
Whose bugles round the world
Blow to the punctual dawns
And fail not; whose great ships
Traverse the seventy seas
And always are at home;
Who are too big for hate,
Too careless and too fine,
Too tempered and too proud—
How shall we hate you back?
For when you see us whole
Our strength is an honest strength
And based on what we love;
And these be two things we love:
Honour, and our fair land—
Honour which is the crown
And jewel and lamp and light
Of them that are not clods;
And our fair English land
Peopled with forthright men
Who make no talk of God,
But fear Him in their hearts,
And fear nor hate, nor death
Nor the King's enemies;—
A land of blunt, brave men,
And blessed with memories

Of old and high renown;
Old Captains who beat forth
In lofty ships of war,
Tawny and tarred and proud,
Old Admirals, who sleep
Safe in the ancient deeps,
And dream for England still:
Oh, you shall stamp us down
When all the seas are red
With the good English blood,
And all the beaches white
With decent English bones,
And when our pleasant fields
Are hillocked with carrion flesh
That cries and cries to heaven
Of coward Englishmen,
And the white Yorkshire rose
Blushes for shame of us,
And her red sister-rose
Blanches for shame of us,
Then shall you stamp us down,
Then shall you suck the blood
Out of the English throats,
And tack this Isle of ours
On to your German wastes!
O haters, fools and blind
Go home and make dolls' eyes,
And silly little clocks,
And plaisters for our gout,
Wimples and cringing-pins!

For now the outraged stars
Have seen enough of you,
The silver moons are sick
That ye still blot the earth;
From icy, hidden peaks
And far-off fastnesses,
From chambers of the South
And in the unconquerable heart
Of England, ware and wake,
The tempest gathers up
That shall be flails for you,
And break you in your place
And scatter you like straw;
Instead of "Hate, hate, hate,"
You shall cry "Doom, doom, doom,"
And you shall wail and mourn,
With none to comfort you
But sprites of murdered babes,
And ghosts of women raped,
And wraiths of great slain men.

The Riddle

Through a glass darkly I can see
Slaves, in whose blood ran liberty;

Creatures of anguish, fear and wrong,
Abject of eye, furtive of tongue;

Whose joy hath taken wings and flown,
Whose strength no longer is their own;

Whose high tower toppled to the dust,
Whose silk and steel are moth and rust;

Whose name is water and shall be
A byword and a mockery;

Who eat the portion of the thrall,
Whose drink is vinegar and gall;

Whose flesh doth suffer whip and rope,
Whose children's children may not hope;

Upon whose fetters chuckling Fate
Hath set her scornful mark "Too late."

And on whose brows that fronted God
The leering Beast writes "Ichabod."

Read you the riddle: who are these
So naked to their enemies—

And so possessed of their old phlegm
That one shall safely spit on them?

I will not tell you who they are;
It is enough—THEY LOST THE WAR.

Ubi Bene

Along the English lanes a budding green,
Upon the English orchards pink and white,
And over them the rapture and delight
Of April sunshine! Fair and fresh and clean,
Washen as if in wells of hyaline
And very wondrous to the pilgrim sight;
A glad, new land of all things soft and bright—
Oh, surely here an angel must have been

And left his blessing! . . . Dead, young son of ours,
Who didst so proudly taste the loving-cup,
Whose blood but now shone like a living rose
Dropped by the Lord upon the Flanders snows,
What country shall they give you to be yours
For this, the England you have given up?

Cor Cordium

He is gone hence. Weep no weak tears for him:
You gave us freely what you valued most;
It is not loss, for gifts are never lost
Unto the giver. Lo, the star-kept, dim
Limits where battle fades away, and grim
Death halts and hath no power! On that coast
His feet are set among the shining host
Who range with cherubim and seraphim.

A thousand suns are unregarded dust,
A million dawns break and are counted not,
And Beauty riseth up, and she departs
Eternally—eternally forgot;
But your fair stripling, dead beside his trust,
Is safely folded in the Heart of Hearts.

A Rhyme of Gaffer D—

I know the old chap very well,
He called on us when I was young—
They sang a hymn and tolled a bell,
“Friend after friend departs,” they sung.

He took my father somewhat quick,
He took my brother from his play,
He took my dog (a dirty trick—
Though he’s the Gaffer, anyway).

After—I didn’t mind of ’im
A-cuttin’ up his grisly capers,
For years and years, although I’d seem
To read about ’im in the papers.

When war broke out, I saw the bills,
What says, “Your King and Country Needs You,”
My ’eart with rule Britannia fills
An’ whispers, “Go where glory leads you.”

But though I loved the 'Uns a treat,
An' would have 'listed brisk an' 'earty,
I always seemed to get cold feet
A-thinkin' of that same Old Party.

Till—well, at last, it had to be,
My girl, she says, "You'll make me proud!"
"Wot about 'im?" says I. Says she,
"Sign up, my lad, an' 'im be blowed!"

An' so I signed and so I joined,
An' learnt my facin's an' my drillin',
An' how to wash my ears behind,
An' always be alert an' willin'.

An' how to do things at the word,
An' stamp when 'alted or "attention"-ed,
An' all the time I never heard
The Old Chap's name so much as mentioned.

Our little lot, they say, is "it,"
And not a bunch to stick at trifles,
In fact for 'ficiency an' grit
We're next door to the Artists' Rifles.

An' yet, my friends, twixt you an' me,
Despite the bluff they feed the boys on,
The Reg'ment don't like Gaffer D——
An', *reely*, 'ates 'im worse than poison.

He is the Major's constant dread,
The fly in the Lieutenant's ointment,
Even the Colonel, so 'tis said,
Will meet him only by appointment.

Oh, he's a wash-out, that Old Gent!
If 'tweren't for him, so 'elp me never,
We'd all of us be well content,
To fight for 'arth and 'ome for ever!

You should ha' seen 'im t'other day,
A-beckonin' us across the trenches—
The very corporils knelt to pray,
An' look at pictures of their wenches!

We did our bit—oh yes, we did,
An' he was in his element—
He took a toll which can't be hid
Until the big new draft is sent.

But still I thank my stars, I does,
('Appy am I it should be so)
That though he wasn't kind to us
He weren't no kinder to the foe. . . .

You won't get rid of that Old Card,
Leastways till you've got rid of sin,—
So here's his 'ealth, say I—the Hard
Old Chap that spoils the soldierin';

The Chap that mocks at mother's prayers,
And loves to widow the young bride;
Yet hurteth only whom he spares,
And makes the rest most satisfied.

The Ass

The enemy without—and he within!

You meet him on the stairs of your high tower
All simpers. At his nose he hath a flower,
Upon his tongue cheap honey; and his chin
Waggeth for ever. If we lose or win—

Please don't talk war! The witty luncheon hour,
The joyous week-end! Good souls, who could sour
So blithe a spirit, or prick so sleek a skin?

Cheerfullest wight! It is his constant whim

To beam on Fate. All that he asks is love,
A salad, a glass of wine, music that charms,

A book, a friend, and "the blue sky above"—
And underneath, the everlasting arms
Of them that toil and groan and bleed for him.

The Diners

"*They died content,*" he said,
And bent a well-groomed head
Sweetly above the soup:

"*Ah, splendid lads !*" he sighed.

"*And . . . (Waiter!) . . . think !—they die
Content ! . . . (the cantaloupe
Wasn't quite ripe enough).*

Real top-hole lads and tough !—

A lesson for those swine !—

(Yes, yes—uncork the wine!)

"*Top-hole, I tell you !—(pish,
I'm not so keen on fish !—*

Don't matter—eat it, dear)—

Beat us ? Good Lord ! No fear !—

With lads like that about !

(Well, well—they *call* it trout!)

Where can you match 'em ? (Oh—

Pâtés of riz de veau !)

"*All heroes !—(Gad—that's Jones—
Wolfing his damned grilled bones—*

Pardon—but really—well—
Grilled bones for dinner! . . . ‘Pell-Mell’?
No, darling, let us go
And see the other show)—
Our chaps are simply ‘it’ !—
(Not just the weeniest bit?
The waiting here’s absurd:
When *will* they bring the bird?)

“*They died content !* . . . (Don’t look—
There’s Mumble and the duke
And Mrs. M.—Of course
She *does* laugh like a horse!)—
They died like gentlemen !
(Chicken? No—ancient hen!—
But still the salad’s good)—
My God—the British blood !

“*You very nearly kissed*
That fearful Casualty List ?—
Ah, precious, you’ve a heart !—
(What excellent strawberry tart!)—
Yes, Haig’s O.K., you bet
He’ll smother ’em—and yet
There must be sacrifice !—
(I shouldn’t risk the ice!)

“(Coffee for two—no cream!)
It all seems like a dream:
Still, we shall win right through,
As we were bound to do. . . .

*They died content !—(Why, sure!—
Did-ums want its liqueur? . . .
And, waiter,—that cigar!
And, waiter—call the car!—
And bring the blanky bill!—
These ‘neutrals’ make me ill!)”*

A Rhyme of Right or Wrong

“Though the race be to the swift
And the battle to the strong
History must one day sift
What is right from what is wrong.

‘History alone can show
Warring nations their true fame,
And on each of them bestow
Proper shares of praise and blame.

“We are right? Let’s hope we are:
But how dreadful it would be
If we chanced to win the war
And no praise from History!

“Therefore clasp Herr Murderer’s fist,
Offer terms to Lustundloot,—
Is he not a Socialist?
And an expert with the flute?

“Keeping on is wrong indeed—
Germans *feel* and *love* and *pray*:
If you prick them don't they bleed
Like the Hebrew in the play?”

Thus the babblers more or less
Platitudinously present
To the public consciousness
An uplifting argument. . . .

History! you've always burned
For sheer justice just too late;
But so far as we're concerned
Put this on your little slate:—

Right or wrong we did not sheathe
Britain's sword till the last Hun
Carried back his loosened teeth
To his own place in the sun.

Right or wrong we did not rest
Till we'd laid that sovereign herb
Comfort, on the outraged breast
Of the Belgian and the Serb.

Right or wrong we watched with France
From the Alps unto the sea,
Through the night of black mischance
Till the dawn of victory.

Right or wrong we smashed the yoke
Greed had forged for the world's neck;
Right or wrong we dealt the stroke
Which brought Kaiserdom to wreck.

Right or wrong we never hid
Our belief that wars would cease;
Right or wrong we made a bid
For the thousand years of peace.

Right or wrong for this we gave
Our young sons to death and doom,—
Every garden had its grave,
Every field a hecatomb.

Right or wrong the German mob
Got their ultimate meal of grit;
(Right or wrong we took the job,
Right or wrong we finished it.)

Right or wrong our faith was true
Though the end seemed "not in sight";
Right or wrong we muddled through
And were thankful—wrong or right.

July 1, 1916

We were unprepared,
We were most unwise;
We have been like that
For centuries—
But we've taught ourselves a thing or two
And we're muddling through.

Twenty-three months!
Twenty-three Men!
Oh, the muddle
And muddle again!—
One can't deny it, because it's true—
But we're muddling through.

Shells and soldiers,
Piles and files;—
The roar goes up
On seventy miles:
We know now what we always knew—
We shall muddle through!

Oh, Banner of ours
That shines in the wars,
Oh, excellent bars
Red, white, and blue,
With glory in every fold of you—
We shall muddle through!

To the Kaiser

With a Child's Drum

He was three years old, a mirthful, tumbling wight,
To see your cohorts pass, he stood at stare,
Unwitting, but pleased; and out of his delight
He laughed you forth a *Vive l'Angleterre*.

Boiled the insulted blood in the high veins
Of the most puissant and invincible
(Whose fathers, spat upon, remarked "It rains!"):
Your soldier fired—rebellious innocence fell.

Wherefore we send you, Conqueror, a child's drum,
And you shall beat upon it as you go
Bloodily stalking to your crazy doom—
The plaything of your murdered baby foe.

Joffre

There's a solid lump of War—
 Name o' Joffre,
Lives on a swift motor-car,
 General Joffre;
Plays with Death at hide and seek—
In and out the Battle's reek—
Kisses heroes twice a week—
 Father Joffre!

Up at dawn to see his friends—
 Healthy Joffre!
Has no patience with week-ends,
 Have yer, Joffre?
“Get the work done—then let's dine!”
Likes his omelette and his wine,
Goes to bed at half-past nine—
 Vigorous Joffre!

“Nibble, nibble all the day”—
 (Patient Joffre!)

Makes the Kaiser kneel and pray,
Don't it, Joffre?
"Nibble, nibble all the night"—
Music for the pale moonlight,
Worries 'em and bleeds 'em white;
Saigner Joffre!

Oh, he's keen on German dead,
Careful Joffre,
"Every one of 'em," he's said
(Monsieur Joffre),
"Helps to fatten the warm, brown
Soil that still is France's own—
Dig 'em in and stamp 'em down!"
Farmer Joffre!

He don't hurry up the Fates,
Doesn't Joffre,
He just waits and waits and waits—
Watchful Joffre!
Then he pounces—un, deux—biff!
Takes 'em right in the midriff,
"Kamerad—par grace!" they sniff.
"—!" says Joffre!

All the time he's fighting Bosche,
Steadfast Joffre!
In his four-three mackintosh,
Thrifty Joffre!

Want to see the German thief
Use a pocket-handkerchief?
Holler at him, brisk and brief,
“Joffre, Joffre, Joffre!”

T’other day, he thought he’d go
(Thinks, does Joffre!)
To the seaside for a blow,
Cheerful Joffre!
Bulgars at the Serbian throat,
Greece behaving like the goat—
“Put me on the Channel boat,”
Murmurs Joffre!

And he wanders down Whitehall,
Simple Joffre!
For to pay his morning call,
Civil Joffre!
Cabinet Ministers in pairs,
Hearing footsteps on the stairs,
Jumped up from their easy chairs—
“Lord, it’s Joffre!”

What he told ’em—well, you know
(Whisper Joffre!)
Must be printed so—and—so,
(Censor—Joffre!)
But on this and this and that,
You may bet your Sunday hat,
They had quite a useful chat,
Friendly Joffre!

So here's to Joffre Bahadur,
 Soldier Joffre!
May he make a hash of "Fader,"
 Frenchman Joffre!
Mr. Kipling, I am sure,
Will be pleased for us to score,
On the old slate, two names more—
 "France" and "Joffre"!

Excuses

I

I have a widow'd mother, to whom I cleave
With a devouring passion. My sole care
And joy she is. "What money I can spare"
Is hers—when she can get it. If I leave
Upon your urgent errand she will grieve
(Poor soul), and find no comfort anywhere—
Beauty draws some men by a single hair;
But me—I'm all for mother, please believe.

A boy's best friend's his mother without a doubt
And a most excellent mother have I got:
'Tis true, the other day, she said, "You go—
I'll struggle through!" I murmured, "Certainly not!"—
Sharp like, and firm. . . . Dear heart, she'll
never know
How much I've loved her—since the war broke out!

II

In me behold the trusty stay and prop
Of Mr. Cheesemonger. He calls me Sam;
I mix his eggs and cut his "splendid" ham,
And clean his windows and sweep up his shop,
And drive his pony till it's fit to drop,
And help his customers into the tram—
I'm indispensable, I am, I am,
And if I went the business would go flop.

Kind Mr. C. remarks "A pretty thing
To want my right-hand man—and like their che
Now, who comes first, your Country and your Kin
Or me?" Of course, I answered, "You do, sir!"
He raised my screw to eighteen bob a week
And claims exemption for a "manager."

III

And I—ah, mine's a bitter case indeed;
You call me slacker, coward, what you will—
I have a patent duty to fulfil
By my white soul whose promptings I must heed:
It's not my fault if heroes choose to bleed,
Blood I abhor, and no man's blood I'll spill,
My conscience simply will not let me kill—
The Sixth Commandment's plain for all to read.

Clearly, who fights is either wicked or mad,
And rage and malice are the spawn of hell;
No quarrel have I with Germans or with Turks:
I'm single—yes! Profession? I used to sell
Cats' meat before the war; but times being bad
I've taken a job at a munition works.

It

“*England has an Achilles’ heel.*”—HINDENBURG

Out of iron and blood
And flame of the nether pit,
And fifty sorts of mud,
They fashioned the great god *It*.

And as he frowned on high
They bade him speak them luck,
And shouted solidly—
“Hoch, hoch! Hoch, hoch—*Von Kluck!*”

But dumb and sour and grim,
He eyed them *haut en bas*:
They cried, “Let’s flatter him—
Moltke! hurrah, hurrah!”

Yet, heavy and dull as lead,
No sign might he evince,
“We’ll tickle him up!” they said—
“Heil, heil! Heil, heil—*Kronprinz!*”

Deafer than any stone,
Dumber than any stock,
Frowned he. They yelled, "Our own
Von Falkenhayn, hoch, hoch!"

Yea, he sat there like sin
Knowing nor sense nor wit,
Till the dry throat of Berlin
Gasped "HINDENBURG IS IT!"

Then did It speak. Like steel
His words—"Beware the Foe
For *your* Achilles' heel
Is her Achilles' toe!"

1912

[*First published in 1910*]

O Fair and Fair and Fierce,
Tigress mother of ours,
Beautiful-browed, deep-thewed
Passionate mother of ours,
Hearken! The drums of doom
Are beaten at the gate,
And it is meet that THOU,
Whose breasts are ice and steel,
Whose heart is all a fire,
Should show us frightened eyes,
And lips becomingly blenched;
So say the very wise.

For when the thrones were made
Thine, the throne of the thrones,
Was set in the yeasty seas:
Built and bastioned and braced,
A tower of brass, a rock,
An adamant pyramid,
A strength unshakable;

And to thy hands were given
Power and dominion
Wherever water is salt,
Wherever a shipboy sings,
Wherever ships may ride;
So that the seas of the world,
Though they be seventy times seven,
Are English seas, and thine;
Whether it be the harsh
And bitter seas of the north,
Flurried by little winds,
And pushed by piping gales
Against the winking stars;
Or the still blue middle seas;
Or where the daffodil moon
Slips down an amethyst sky
To walk with silver feet
On the Southern, soft lagoons,
It is the English sea. . . .

Who is this that waits
By the weary Baltic shore,
By the kneeling Baltic shore,
With shrouded arm and hand,
And a hand whereon there gleams
A glove of impudent mail?
Behind him stretch afar
The pleasant, placid spas,
Fattened with English aches;
And the four-three factories,

And the reek of the dumper's fires,
And the pretty river Rhine
(Which owes so much to Cooks),
And rows, and rows, and rows
Of flat-head soldier men,
And the works of Schichau and Krupp,
And for a sign in the blue,
The tender himmelblau,
The good, 'grey Count's balloons!

Do you know this singular Lord,
This humorous, hearty Prince,
Whose cry is "Peace, Peace, Peace,"
Abroad, and at home "War, War";
Who preaches through the day
With olive twigs in his hair,
And rises in the night
To fan the secret forge;
Who says, "Why should we fight?
Prithee, why should we fight?
What cause have we to fight?
Are we not friends, please God,
And CUSTOMERS? . . . My glass
Is raised to you and Peace
Hurra, Hurra, Hurra!"

Who says again, "My arms
Must flourish on the seas,
My arms and mine alone
If you wish a place in the sun;
As for the one in our path,

The one whom we all so love,
By nineteen hundred and twelve
I shall be ready for HER!!
I have promised you your Day—
Hurra, Hurra, Hurra!”

It is nineteen hundred and ten
And the Seas are English seas,
They will be English seas
Till they shall give up Drake
And the thousand English hearts
Which have made rich the depths:
Until they shall be rolled
Together like a scroll
They shall be English seas.
We sleep sound in our beds;
We fear no fist of mail;
We fear no withered arm;
We are not afraid of Krupp
Nor yet of Blohm and Voss.
We wish you the Devil's joy
Of all you have hidden and built;
It is nineteen hundred and ten.
We have simple words for you:
In the English history books
There is EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND FIVE;
We say to you when you pray,
Thank Heaven if we do not write
In the English history books
With beautiful German blood
NINETEEN HUNDRED AND TWELVE.

Towards the Reckoning

With tongue of oil and breath of myrrh
They bid us turn the other cheek,
And mark the blessing for the meek,
The mourner and the peacemaker.

They counsel, "Love your enemies;
Do good to them who bear you hate;
Agree thou quickly!" and they prate
Of being, with the great wisdom, wise.

"Of Eye for Eye and Tooth for Tooth
None righteously exacts the debt;
It is forbidden!" they say—and yet
They publish only half the truth.

And by their speech the grinning Host
Which hath Blasphemed takes lease to live. . . .
Harden our hearts, lest we forgive
The Sin against the Holy Ghost!

Verdun

“One shall be taken and the other left”—
’Tis so with men, and even so with forts;
One falls, another stands—the strong cohorts
Beat vainly on it in rage of divers sorts—
One shall be taken and the other left.

One shall be taken and the other left—
Behold the Bride that singeth through the gloom,
And waiteth still with scorn the German groom,
And fears not to be given away by Doom!—
One shall be taken and the other left.

One shall be taken and the other left—
O eyes of Hell and fronts of bloody brass,
France, by her Lilies, sweareth ye may not pass
Unto her—though the bar were brittlest glass!—
One shall be taken and the other left.

Ireland

I

Our right—and your old wrongs.

With men's and angels' tongues
We did discourse. Alas—
The tinkling cymbal and the sounding brass!

We “ruled.” You mourned and planned.

We had gifts to understand
All knowledge, all dreams, all star-sad mystery;
Mountains we moved, while you made prophecy.

We Doubted not. Your Eyes

Were set on Paradise.
Yet always, and most grievously,
Both of us missed the “greatest” of “these three.”

II

Your fair dead—our fair dead.

Now, by each fallen head
And each rebuking wraith,
Swear we another Faith.

Your night of tears—our night.

But, by the unquenchable Light
Toward which, blindly, we grope,
Behold, another Hope!

Our agony—and yours.

Yea, by the Passionate Hours
And the Exceeding Bitter Cry,
Do we still lack . . . the Charity!

If

[With apologies to Mr. Kipling]

If you can lend your money to McKenna,
And keep on lending all you have to spare;
If you believe that "simple things like senna
Are just as good as the best Brighton air";
If you can wrastle six days in the City,
Running the show short-handed, or alone,
And never have your moments of self-pity
And never *once* say "*Bless* the telephone!"

If you can face the rain on homeward buses,
To save the cost of the old taxi ride,
And wonder why young people make such fusses
When "24's" are few and "full inside";
If you can don your country coat and breeches
And dine in state off yesterday's cold joint,
And read the missus Mr. Asquith's speeches
And reason with her till she sees the point;

If you survey "the drama as it passes,"
Without a thought of this or that man's guile;
If you deny that Ministers are asses,
And pay the taxes with a friendly smile;
If you can write before your son's name, "Private,"
And never wish he wore a nice red tab;
If on mature reflection, you arrive at
The view that life in war-time *isn't* drab;

If you can hear without a secret quailing
That there were losses in last night's advance;
If you can meet the postman without paling,
And open telegrams with nonchalance;
If you can read the letter from the Major,
That puts a "finis" to your earthly joy,
And stand up straight—and *stiff-lipped*—you may wager
That, on the whole, you are a MAN, old boy!

Wounded

Back again! Back again! Out o' blood and mud and
rain;

Out o' gun-sound . . . God a'mighty!

Out o' Blazes and home to "Blighty"!—

Broke right up and full o' pain,

But back again—back again!

Back again! Back again! By an extry special train

With the Red Cross on the panels—

Snuggled in me nice new flannels—

Like the blinkin' King o' Spain—

Back again! Back again!

Back again! Back again! Clapham Junction plain as
plain!—

Just as grimy, just as gloomy,

Just as home-like, and as roomy—

Dead on time—we can't complain—

Back again! Back again!

Back again! Back again! Waterloo and rows o' men

Down the platform standing ready

For to lift us quick and steady—
Nurses smiling—“How’s the pain?”
Back again! Back again!

Back again! Back again! London Town and home again—
Ever knew how much they loved us,—
In the ambulance they’ve shoved us—
Nearly numbered with the slain
But back again—back again!

Come Young Lads First

Sergeant went a-walking
Wi' ribbons in his cap,
"Ho-ho," says he, "His Majesty
Wants just another chap,
An' as 'tis plain, for married men
He no more cares a rap,
Come young lads first!"

Wherefore the bairn I suckled
Goes now in khaki drest;
So young is he, that he med be
Still cosy from my breast;
But he marches with his chin up
An' his chest out, like the rest,
Come young lads first!

Old Squire says, "Oh yes, oh yes,
'Twill do him worlds of good";
An' parson says that losing bairns
If rightly understood
Is blessed, an' 'tis sweet, he says,
For th' King to shed your blood—
Come young lads first!

“Abram,” he says, “gave Isaac,
As writ in Holy Word,
An’ Mary broke the precious box
At the feet of our dear Lord;
So you must give your boy,” he says,
“To carry England’s sword,
Come young lads first!”

They speak you fair do gentlemen,
But not more fair or free
Than my young son, who’s just the one
His father used to be;
And when I said he med get killed
He angers up at me,
“Come young lads first!”

For he’s no lad that hides his mind
An’ he’s no lad that feigns;
An’ while he spoke my heart came back
As easy of its pains
As when his father courted me
Along the scented lanes—
Come young lads first!

A woman has her love (it is
Her glory and her crown)
Which many waters cannot quench
An’ the great floods cannot drown;
But men have that which passes love
When they hear the bugles blown—
Come young lads first!

An' so the bairn I suckled
Goes now in khaki drest,
So young is he, that he med be
Still cosy from my breast;
An' he marches with his chin up
An' his chest out, like the rest—
Come young lads first!

The Rhyme of the Beast

Lo, the Beast that rioteth,
Sick with hate and coveting—
To the sons of men he saith,
I will show you a new thing.

This, the Earth, which was the Lord's,
Prodigal of rose and vine,
I will desolate with swords
Till it own that it is mine.

Every brow must bear my brand,
Every wrist must wear my steel,
Every throat be for my hand,
Every neck be for my heel.

I will thrust into your souls
Unnamed terrors and despairs—
Populate the air with ghouls
And the sea with murderers.

While I prove that war is war,
Saints shall mourn and angels weep,
Star commiserate with star,
Deep cry out to shuddering deep;

Tigers marvel in their lust
At the tale of blood and pain,
Pity move the insensate dust
And the very stones complain.

I will twist the tongue of Truth
Till her speech be nought but lies,
I will kill the faith of Youth,
And the hope in Age's eyes.

Not the altar, nor the tomb,
Nor the Sufferer on the Tree,
Nor the babe within the womb
Shall be sacred unto me.

I will rend and rage and cog,
Rob and ravish till I die;
I will be the Supreme Hog
And the world shall be my sty.

Gaudeamus

"Our whole High Seas Fleet, without any aid from coast batteries, has delivered a victorious blow against the most powerful navy in the world. . . . The great sea fight so eagerly expected on both sides in the North Sea for twenty-two months has been fought out."—TAGEBLATT

This is your "victory"!
We who brook no defeat,
On any sea,
Being of the old sea-mind,
Smile the sea-smile, and find
Our very losses sweet.

Of your "victorious blow"
We give you the full joy:
Be glad! We know
Our strengths majestic—
Our every admiral,
Our every sailor boy.

Yet is it not "fought out":
Lick you your wounds, good friends,
And shout and shout—
You will not shake
Nelson, or Hood, or Drake,
Or the appointed ends.

For Whom It May Concern

Ye know that Freedom from her height
Laughs on the world in Fate's despite:
 Here is her comfort set:—
 England is England yet.

Ye know that all the fronts of War
Shine with the effulgent English star;
 Ye know whose is the blood
 That baffled and withstood

Old tyrants; and full well ye know
There never can be shock or blow
 To hurt more than a reed
 The panoply of your breed.

How shall you in such armour girt
Palter behind a woman's skirt,
 Or that man's pledge, or this
 Man's broken promises?

While the slipped flower of the race
Comports him in the veteran's place—
His shroud (oh, Fearlessness!)
Worn like a wedding dress.

You will not grieve those emulous dead
Boy heritors of goodlihead,
Who haply loved their lives
Much as you love your wives.

Slain

Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori

You who are still and white
And cold like stone;
For whom the unfailing light
Is spent and done;

For whom no more the breath
Of dawn, nor evenfall
Nor Spring, nor love, nor death
Matter at all;

Who were so strong and young
And brave and wise,
And on the dark are flung
With darkened eyes;

Who roystered and caroused
But yesterday,
And now are dumbly housed
In stranger clay;

Who valiantly led,
Who followed valiantly,
Who knew no touch of dread
Of that which was to be;

Children that were as nought
Ere ye were tried,
How have ye dared and fought,
Triumphed and died!

Yea, it is very sweet
And decorous
The omnipotent Shade to meet
And flatter thus.

THE END



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